

Congress annually considers several appropriations measures, which provide funding for numerous activities, for example, national defense, education, homeland security, crime, as well as general government operations. On this page you'll find some answers to the following questions:

- [What is the appropriations process?](#)
- [How does the appropriations process work?](#)
- [What is the timeline for appropriations bills?](#)
- [What is an earmark?](#)

Additional Resources:

- [House Appropriations Committee](#)
  - [House Budget Committee](#)
  - [Congressional Research Service report: "Overview of the Authorization- Appropriations Process"](#)
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### What is the appropriations process?

Article I, Section 9, Clause 7 of the Constitution provides that "No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law." Therefore, all expenditures for all federal agencies and programs must be approved by Congress and then signed by the President.

About 2/3 of federal spending is "non-discretionary." This is for programs like Social Security, whose annual costs are already determined by law based on the number of people served and their eligibility. The remaining 1/3 is "discretionary": this includes areas like defense or education funding, for which the spending is set each year by the Congress and the President.

Discretionary spending bills are generally enacted annually for the next fiscal year. It is a two-part process. Discretionary spending is usually first "authorized" in one bill, and then the actual funding is "appropriated" in another bill - an "appropriations bill." This mechanism is

meant to help control overall spending.

Once funds are appropriated, Congress expects that these funds will be used during the fiscal year for which they are appropriated. Congress must enact annual appropriations bills prior to the beginning of the each fiscal year (October 1) or provide interim funding for the affected programs through a "continuing resolution." Sometimes, the Congress will combine several appropriations bills at the end of the year and pass them all together as an "omnibus."

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### **How does the appropriations process work?**

An appropriations bill is considered in much the same way as other bills that pass through Congress. It is introduced by Members of the House and Senate, subcommittee hearings are held, subcommittees and committees amend the bills and vote on them, they are considered by the full House and Senate and votes are taken, a conference committee is appointed to reconcile differences between the two chambers' versions, and the conference report (i.e. the final bill) is then voted on by the House and Senate and sent to the President for signature or veto.

Unlike other legislation however, the appropriations process generally follows an annual timeline. The House generally begins the process with the Appropriations Committee's subcommittees (one for each of the 12 bills) holding extensive hearings on each of the spending bills. Hearings usually begin in early March, soon after the President's budget is submitted to Congress.

The House starts voting on appropriations bills in May and seeks to complete this by the August district work period. In recent years, however, many of these votes have not occurred until the fall. The Senate may begin committee work on its 11 spending bills and may even vote on the bills before the House completes its work.

After the House and the Senate have each voted on its versions of an appropriations bill, a conference committee meets. That committee consists of equal number of House and Senate members who reconcile any differences between the spending bills.

The conference committees make the final decisions on bills and reconcile the differences. The conference report is then sent to both the House and Senate for approval. If approved, it is then sent to President. After the President signs a bill, each impacted department or agency reviews the bill, makes the regulatory changes mandated by Congress and begins allocating the funding to appropriate departments and projects referenced in the bill. When there is a direct appropriation to an outside entity, the agency will usually allocate funding to the organization or community in the spring (mid-March through May).

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### What is the timeline for appropriations bills?

- *First Monday in February* - President submits budget for following fiscal year to Congress
- *February 15 to April 15* - Congress considers and passes a budget resolution
- *Late February through late March* - House Appropriations subcommittees begin hearings on 12 appropriations bills - begins "marking-up" (amending) bills.
- *March through June* - Senate Committee considers its 12 appropriations bills.
- *June 10* - House Appropriation Committee reports to full House the last of its appropriations bills.
- *June 30* - House concludes action on regular appropriations bills.
- *By August* - Senate and House usually have voted on their appropriations bills. Some bills will have already gone through conference committee, approved by the House and Senate and sent to the President.
- *September* - Remaining conference committees meet to finalize appropriations bills. They are voted on and sent to the President for signature
- *October 1* - New fiscal year begins
- *October* - If necessary, Continuing Resolutions allow the federal government to continue working under previous year's budget authority until their appropriations for the current Fiscal Year are approved.

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### What is an earmark?

An earmark is a direction from Congress to the Executive Branch that specifies or designates how federal funds should be spent. Contrary to popular belief, **earmarks in the annual appropriations bills are not additional spending**. Rather, they are a way for Congress to control how the money is used.

Generally speaking, I support Congressional earmarks in the federal appropriations process. The United States Constitution clearly places the responsibility to spend the public's money in the hands of Congress, not in the hands of the President or federal bureaucracies.

As the elected representative of the 4th Congressional District, I believe I have a better understanding of the needs of our communities than Washington bureaucrats, who would otherwise direct the funds. I make decisions about what projects to support after consulting with constituents, county commissioners, city officials, and other members of the community. And I only support the most meritorious projects that provide real benefits to taxpayers and that I would be happy to defend to any of my constituents.

Further, I believe in the benefits generated by projects for which I seek funding for. I am pleased to have secured funding for crucial transportation and infrastructure projects, wastewater systems in rural communities, K-12 and university educational programs, job training programs, and projects to clean up and improve our environment. These projects have created and sustained jobs, improved the economic vitality of our cities and counties, and helped leverage additional investments in our communities.

But I am aware of the abuses to the earmark process and I share your concerns about some of the wasteful spending in Washington. The fact is, when Republicans took over Congress in 1994, there were 4,000 earmarks in federal appropriations bills. At the end of the 109th

Congress in 2005, there were 15,000. The Bush Administration and his Republican colleagues promised fiscal responsibility; but instead we got a tripling of the number of earmarks that has helped erode public trust in our government.

In response, the new Democratically-controlled Congress and Administration have implemented strong reforms, which I fully support. **Since re-gaining control of Congress, Democrats have cut earmarks to 50% of 2006 levels and less than 1% of the discretionary budget.**

The Democratic Congress and President Obama have also agreed to the following reforms that will cut the number of earmarks and improve accountability:

- 1) All earmark requests must be disclosed to the public online when the request is initially made to appropriators;
- 2) Members must certify that they (and their spouses) have no personal financial interest in the request;
- 3) The appropriate executive review committee will have 20 days to evaluate the eligibility and merit of requested earmarks;
- 4) The Appropriations Committee will provide early public disclosure in each appropriations bill by identifying every earmark and the requesting Member;
- 5) All earmarks to for-profit parties are subject to the competitive bid process.

It is important for Congress to fund needed projects in our communities in a fiscally responsible way. The reforms implemented by the Democratically-controlled Congress to the earmark process will help this cause immensely.

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